

Providence Marine Corps Arsenal
175 Benefit Street
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-152

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
55-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

PROVIDENCE MARINE CORPS ARSENAL

HABS
RI,
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Address: 176 Benefit Street, Providence, Providence
County, Rhode Island.

Present Owner: State of Rhode Island.

Present Occupant: Various veterans' organizations.

Present Use: Clubrooms and meeting rooms.

Brief Statement
of Significance: Built in 1840, this is an interesting example
of an early armory, and was used by the Providence
Marine Corps of Artillery for many years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Providence Marine Corps of Artillery Chartered Command incorporated in 1801, erected arsenal on Benefit Street in 1840. Erected by members of the organization and delivered to the state which paid off indebtedness and gave the organization a one thousand year lease. Served as State Armory until 1908, when the Cranston Street Armory was built.
2. Date of erection: 1840.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: The building was moved north to southwest corner of Benefit and Meeting Streets in 1906 (see Scrap Book #44, p. 60 in the Rhode Island Historical Society for Providence Journal clipping dated 1806), from site of New Haven Railroad tunnel about a half block south between Thomas and Meeting Streets on the west side of Benefit. Present basement dates from 1906.
4. Sources of information:

Welcome Arnold Greene, The Providence Plantation for 250 Years (Providence: J. A. and R. A. Reed, 1886), pp. 180-181.
John Hutchins Cady, The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island: The Book Shop, 1957), p. 111.
Robert L. Wheeler, in "The Rhode Islander," the magazine section of the Providence Sunday Journal, February 10, 1952, pp. 3, ff.

Providence Magazine, Board of Trade Journal, January, 1919, p. 9. (Rhode Island Magazine B).

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The Providence Marine Corps of Artillery had its origin in the Providence Marine Society which was chartered in 1801 copying the provisions of the branch of the British naval service bearing similar name. The Providence Marine Corps of Artillery assisted in throwing up fortifications, for defense of the town in the War of 1812, helped quell the Dorr Insurrection in 1842, took part in the Civil War, and was mustered into the U. S. Service in 1898.

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing
for the Providence Preservation Society
August, 1961.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a large stone armory, with a fortified, Gothic Revival facade.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Nearly rectangular structure about 50' front x 75', two stories high at the front with battlemented, three-story towers at both corners; lot sloping to rear with basement at ground level.
2. Foundations: Concrete, not original.
3. Wall construction: Fieldstone covered with plaster; the fieldstone is visible on the inside of the towers. Exterior walls originally marked like regular ashlar masonry.
4. Chimneys: Not visible from the ground.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors: 9-1/2' wide bay, two stories high with Tudor pointed arch, at the center of the east front, has two sets of double doors, one above the other leading to the two floors. Two Revolutionary War cannons

serve as corner posts. First floor entrance doors are thick paneled doors with vertical boards on the inside, 4-1/2' wide, about 10' high, patterned with pointed bolt heads. First floor door has diamond paned transom light. Second floor has batten doors to outside with pointed arch head, originally had a hoist. Wide wood double door to basement on west side.

- b. Windows: Tower windows are protected by and set behind 4" wide slits in the masonry walls which splay out on the inside. Other windows are double hung with small triangular panes, and with iron shutters.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof; shingled.
- b. Cornice: Coved cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: First floor; vestibule at the entrance, utility room under northeast tower, office and stairway under southeast tower, remainder of first floor one large assembly room. Basement: dates from 1906, used for furnace room, storage, garage, etc. Second floor: stairway and hall at east end, remainder divided into two large and two small club rooms.
2. Stairways: U-shape with open well, closed railings with vertical boards.
3. Flooring: Later concrete basement floor. Original first floor structure supported by miscellaneous wood, cast iron, steel posts. Wood, first and second floors. First floor, 2" maple, probably later.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Vestibule: 1-1/2" vertical boarding to about 5'. Main room on first floor: north and south walls have oak grained wainscoting, heavy molded chair rail, horizontal boarding for 2' above chair rail, plaster above; benches supported by Tudor arches along entire north and south walls. West wall has wainscoting to about 9', Gothic paneling similar to opposite east wall, with coved cornice which steps up over windows (now closed); ceiling is flat, about 25' high, 15" bracket cornice, four large cross beams (north-south) with joists about 15" on center (east-west),

Gothic pendant drops in center of each large beam, boarding between joists. Second floor has high wainscoting of wide vertical boards, plaster walls, above and ceilings, exposed roof trusses.

5. Doorways and doors: East wall of main room divided into three Tudor arches with heavy trim; main entrance from vestibule in center arch, Tudor Gothic doorway, vertical **board** door; two side arches have similar doors with balconies above.
6. Hardware: Original hardware on doors includes heavy strap hinges and iron bolts.
7. Lighting: Combination gas and electric fixtures.
8. Heating: Central heating, no fireplaces or chimneys for fireplaces.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Faces east on Benefit Street, southwest corner lot.
2. Walks, driveways: Concrete sidewalks on north and east, cobblestone drive on south and west sides.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
August, 1961.